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APPENDIX 8

The Place of Fire in Chinese Religion.

There seem to be a number of ideas underlying the use of fire in Chinese 788
igion, which may be summarized as follows; 822

1. As an honor to the god or spirit.
2. As symbolizing or embodying souls or spirits.
3. As a means of transfering material things to the spirit world.
4. As a purifying and protective agency.

There does not seem to be evidence that fire is used to assist or represent
e sun, or to aid in fertilizing the earth, but it would be rash to say such
eas do not exist somewhere. Food offered as a sacrifice is sometimes cooked,
metimes not, but there are no " Burnt offerings " in the temples of Anking.

1. Lights seem to be a necessity in every religious observance, or at least
those held indoors. Candles are always present, and in temples, oil lamps
e placed in conical frames, a hundred or more to one stand, giving a dazzling
d brilliant effect. The lowest number used is two, but the more lights,
e more honor and reverence to the god, so that on festivals a large temple
ll be ablaze with dancing flames.

2. On New Year's Eve, when all Chinese are home if it is possible, each
rson lights a lantern or lamp, and woe to the unlucky man whose light is
tinguished or paper lantern burnt, for evil will surely find him within the

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year. It would seem that the flame has some connection with the soul, or that such a belief gave rise to the custom. The illumination of paper dragons and other animals at such festivals as the Yuen Hsiao Chieh may also illustrate the idea. On the Shan Tzi Chieh, the 3rd of the 3rd month, men see at night the "Fires of the Dead" (K'an kuei ho), which seem to be something like the Will of the Wisp. The more lights are seen, the greater the number of deaths within the year.

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3. At funerals, paper houses, servants, money and other objects are burned in order to provide comforts for the newly released spirit. Petitions are addressed to gods and burnt, the flames carrying them to the desired destination. Possibly the burning of the sacrifice served a similar purpose.

4. Fire is also used as a cleansing and protective force. Lights are lit to drive away evil spirits, and the noise of gongs and firecrackers is useful in the same way. When a coffin is carried out of the house in a funeral procession, it passes above a fire on which wine is thrown, and when a man has unexpectedly met something unfavorable, such as a coffin, his family may build a fire over which he leaps. At the Dragon Boat Festival, fires are built with a plant called Ai 艾 which gives out a sweet odour and is said to kill mosquitoes, but as the fires are built on this day only, the original reason for the custom was probably protection from spirits. When a bride is about to enter her future home, relatives of the groom hand her a dish containing fire, which she places on the floor of her sedan chair between her feet. There does not seem to be any Chinese custom of driving animals through fires, but at a memorial service held at the end of the period of mourning, the chief mourners throw their coarse, white garments across the fire to destroy evil influences. They also run round the fire, kneel down, and lament, while making a great noise to drive away devils. Fires are lit at a number of Chinese festivals, for instance, the Shih Yuen Chao and the Little New Year.

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I [Errata: Should be Chih. Cf. Errata Sheet, p204, cat. 116 -- Analyst]

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822 Baths are also used to cleanse from evil. An old custom, now almost abandoned around Anking, was to bathe on the 3rd of the 3rd month, a day for the worship or propitiation of spirits, which would fall sometime in April. On the 6th of the 6th month people wash in rivers, and throw dogs and cats into the water, while children are washed in water which has been set in the sun. Some families have a ceremonial washing of feet on the 27th of the 12th month, and everyone bathes for the New Year.

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